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2008 Hana Dušáková

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A Picture of Man in the Works by Endo Shusaku

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V Rychnově nad Kněžnou dne 3. srpna 2008

Hana Dušáková

ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Obraz člověka v díle Endó Šúsaku
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Autor práce	Hana Dušáková
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Poděkování

Ráda bych poděkovala především paní profesorce Zdence Švarcové za trpělivost, inspiraci a cenné rady nejen při vedení práce, ale i během celého dosavadního studia japanologie. Dále děkuji všem přednášejícím na Japonských studiích Filozofické fakulty Karlovy univerzity v Praze, a v neposlední řadě i kolektivu svých spolužáků.

Abstrakt:

V bakalářské práci se věnuji třem dílům poválečného japonského autora Endó Šúsaku. V románech *Moře a jed*, *Mlčení* a *Hluboká řeka* se zaměřuji na charakterizaci hlavních postav a především na jejich morální postoje a jednání v mezních situacích, ve kterých je autor zobrazuje. V každém z těchto děl se objevuje téma zodpovědnosti a svědomí, kdy hlavní hrdina dochází postupně k poznání, že v situacích, kdy je v sázce život druhého člověka, musí najít odvahu i k takovému rozhodnutí, které se vymyká jeho dosavadním zkušenostem nebo odporuje obecně uznávaným pravdám. Autor tak naznačuje, že hranice mezi „správným“ a „špatným“ není zdaleka vždy jasná. Do románů se promítá i autorova katolická víra a jeho přesvědčení, že základní morální principy křesťanství mají univerzální platnost bez ohledu na kulturní a náboženské tradice dané společnosti.

V závěru práce se pokouším o interpretaci literárních postav v těchto třech románech v souvislosti s autorovým vnímáním člověka a lidskosti.

Contents

1. Introduction

The Japanese novelist Endo Shusaku, certainly stands out among the generation of Japanese postwar writers for his deep concern with frailty of human soul, for compassion with a failing individual and for his sincere examination of the possibility of reconciling the Christian perspective with Japanese psyche. While his relatively recent death in 1996 did not yet allow for substantial literary criticism to accumulate, the message of his novels – which are highly acclaimed both in Japan and abroad – has already won overwhelmingly positive reception from readers and critics worldwide, precisely for the values that Endo emphasizes in his novels.

My reasons for having selected Endo Shusaku as the topic of my thesis would largely be identical with those of Endo's large readership. Aside from that, what I truly came to admire while reading Endo's novels, is his superb ability to create unique character types whose experience surpasses the chronological and spatial framework of a given novel and transcends into the realm of common human experience. Endo's portrayal of protagonists from a variety of cultural, historical and geographical environments (ranging from 17th century Japan countryside to the bustle of postmodern Tokyo), demonstrates not only his literary craftsmanship, but also mastery in understanding and depicting the issues which are universal and perennial.

Endo can by all means be counted to the circle of authors who accomplished to create characters appealing to the innermost in human psyche – to our conscience, our guilt, our own doubts... He does not evade complicated and dark aspects of human psychology; on the contrary, in all his writing Endo explores and probes into the secret recesses of one's mind and soul, commonly portraying an individual in times of great spiritual distress and under circumstances when the line between good and evil, between one's duty and one's desire becomes hopelessly blurred and leaves no guidance as to what is proper, just and virtuous.

To make his writings even more complex, Endo also introduces the ultimate entity, the figure of God, whose existence in more or less explicit manner appears in the novels, shapes the characters´ course of thinking or serves as a reflection thereof.

Though he shunned the appellation “Catholic writer,” Endo’s Christian faith inevitably permeates his works brings an uncommon perspective into postwar modern Japanese literature.

For the above mentioned reasons, the characters as they appear in Endo Shusaku’s novels would be the focus of my work. For the scope of this thesis, I had to limit the number of analyzed excerpts and decided to choose three novels, which I consider most representative and illustrative of his employment of literary characters in the context of the themes he pursued. Another factor which also came into question, was the local availability of Endo’s novels and their English or Czech translations. Only two of his novels have been translated into Czech language (Moře a jed, 1980, and Mlčení, 1987, both by Libuše Boháčková), I will be therefore referring to the English translation of these and other works. Since the existing secondary literary criticism is limited largely to scholarly papers and studies in English, I have decided to use it as my working language for this thesis and whenever there is an original Czech excerpt in my bibliography, I took the liberty to provide my own attempt at translation.

When mentioning persons’ names, I observe the Japanese custom of writing first the family name, then the personal one.

Three novels were thus chosen as primary sources:

- The Sea and Poison (Umi to dokuyaku, 1957) □□□□
- Silence (Chinmoku, 1966) □□
- Deep River (Fukaikawa, 1993) □□□

Method of interpretation

The first chapter will be devoted to introducing the figure of Endo Shusaku, providing a survey of his biography, especially such events in his life which became relevant for his career as a writer, together with an overview of his principal and most influential works.

Before moving to the main part, that is the characterization and interpretation of Endo's protagonists, I will spend some time on basic theoretical presumptions of reading and interpreting literature, discussing some possible approaches that current literary criticism offers, in regard to the analysis of Endo's characters.

In the discussion of the respective novels, I will first introduce the context for their publication and their setting, with a very brief historical overview when necessary, before focusing on the principal characters. Working with two or three protagonists from each novel, I will try to analyze how they are depicted, what function they serve in the novel, and their interactions and relations in the context of the novel's plot and Endo's prevailing themes, that is individual responsibility, spiritual search, and the portrayal of human beings. In the final chapter, I will attempt to present some conclusions resulting from this interpretation, again in view of the themes Endo explored.

2. Life and work of Endo Shusaku

Endo Shusaku was born in Tokyo in 1923, but due to his father's business as a banker, in 1926 the family moved to Dalien in Manchuria, and Endo spent part of his childhood there. However, in 1933 the parents divorced, and Endo returned to Japan with his mother (incidentally, she was the sister of the prewar Japanese writer Koda Rohan)[1], who played a major role in his life and was also instrumental in introducing her son to catechism and Catholic faith. Endo was confirmed into Catholic Church at the age of eleven. During his formative years, Endo was growing up in his mother's native city of Kobe, and it was during the war when he began his university studies. Since his artistically inclined mother supported Endo's literary and musical talents, his natural choice became the study of literature, much against his father's wishes, who had unsuccessfully tried to steer him towards medical career. Endo initially faced difficulties in securing admission to college, but eventually, after his third try, in 1943 became enrolled in the Keio University, where he decided to focus on French literature, especially on modern French novel.[2]

At the age of 27, Endo also became the first postwar Japanese student to receive foreign scholarship, and he entered the University of Lyon. His study in France, where he lived from 1950 to 1953, further influenced him in the interests and themes he was to pursue throughout his literary life – namely Catholicism, philosophy, individual responsibility, isolation and relation to foreign cultures. His stay in postwar France however, was not an uncomplicated one. As a national of a defeated country and a member of non-white race, he became disillusioned by frequent encounters with racial prejudice and bigotry. [3][4] Moreover, while in Lyon, his pulmonary disease worsened and he was forced to terminate his study program earlier and return to Japan.

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[1] Vlasta Winkelhöferová: Slovník japonské literatury: Praha, Libri 2008, p. 173

[2] While still a junior student, Endo managed to write and get published two important critical essays, which, as he confessed, "Introduced the themes that would later occupy me in my novels" (Mathy, p.66) These essays were *Gods and the God* □□□□□, and *Problems of a Catholic writer* □□□□□□□□□□, which appeared in 1947 in a literary magazine called Shiki □□(Maeri, p.8)

[3] Yancey, Philips. The Message the Japanese Have Missed. *Christianity Today*; Mar 17, 1989, 33, 5, p. 56, ProQuest Religion

[4] This experience of alienation and isolation, based either on religion - as a Catholic in Japan, or on race - an Asian in France, is evidently embodied in the character of Otsu in Deep River. This protagonist is a Japanese youth studying theology in France and facing disappointment – instead of acceptance by fellow Christians he hoped for, and which he was unable to find in Japan, he becomes excluded for being Japanese.

There he recovered and continued writing critical essays and publishing articles in literary journals; in 1955, his first novel Shiroi Hito (□□□ White Man) appeared, drawing on the problem of discrimination and racial inequality. The book won Endo Akutagawa Prize, and encouraged him to fully embrace his career as a writer. In the same year, the young promising author firmly established himself on the post-war literary scene by a sequel published in a magazine, titled Kiiroi Hito (Yellow Man, □□□□ 1955), and more importantly, two years later with his novel Umi to Dokuyaku (□□□□ sea and poison , 1957), which was the first of his works based on true events. Endo was the first author who dared to deal with a very sensitive recent problem: the novel depicts the vivisections performed on American prisoners of war in Fukuoka under secret program of the Japanese government) and which brought him two important awards: Shincho Literary Award, and the Mainichi cultural Award.[5]

Most of Endo's major works were published in the late 1960s and 1970s. In context of Japanese literary chronology, Endo is often ranked among the so-called third wave of post-war authors.[6][7] During his writing career, totaling 38 years, Endo continued to alternate writing more "serious" works with lighter "entertainment novels," which were usually first published in installments in newspapers and magazines (some under a penname). It has to be said, however, that in Endo's case the quantity (it is said that Endo wrote on the average "one full-length novel a year"[8] – never compromised the quality of his works, and both "types" were always well received by the audience and critics. Some of the novels dealing with true historical events and one's psychological conflicts induced by them, were for instance *Samurai* (□ 1980) or *Silence*, those set in contemporary world were, among others, *Nigger* (□□□ 1973), *The Girl I Left Behind* (□□□□□□ *1963), When I Whistle* (□□□□□□, 1974), *On the Shores of the Dead Sea* (1973).

Aside from novels, which always formed the core of his writing, Endo is also known as an author of several theatre plays, essays, and biographies. One of the plays (Ógon no kuni, 1966, *The Golden Country*) explores the theme presented in *Silence* – the

[5] Mathy, Francis. Shusaku Endo: Japanese Catholic Novelist. *America*, Aug 1, 1992, 167, 3; p. 66, ProQuest Religion

[6] Vlasta Winkelhöferová: *Slovník japonské literatury*: Praha, Libri 2008, p. 74

[7] Novák, Miroslav a Winkelhöferová, Vlasta. *Japonská literatura*, sv. II, Praha, SPN, 1977, p. 154

[8] Mathy, Francis

korobi □□, or apostasy, of Japanese Christians). The three biographies, which appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, concern the Christian daimyo Yukinaga Konishi, the Japanese Jesuit priest Peter Kibe, and the commander of the Japanese colony in the 17th century Siam, Nagamasa Yamada. The figure of Peter Kibe, an extraordinary personage himself, also appears in a later play, *The Japanese of the Menam River*, where Endo poses questions as to what led this Japanese priest to return from Rome to Japan to minister the persecuted Christians there, and dying a martyr's death. In addition, Catholic believers also value Endo's nonfiction work *A Life of Jesus* (1977) and *The birth of Christ* (1978), and a collections of essays titled *Religion and Literature* (1963) and *Stones Speak* (1970).

Endo was also known as a public figure, he had his weekly column in newspaper for many years, and for some time he was even a host for an NHK weekly discussion program on religion, making interviews with world's well-known religious leaders and scholars. Endo also served as a President of the Japanese P.E.N club, and was awarded numerous prizes and honorary doctorates for his lifetime achievements on the field of literature and for seeking understanding between different religions and cultures. To mention just one, in 1971 the Pope Paul VI. awarded Endo the Order of St. Sylvester.

During his life, Endo published a total of forty-five novels and seventeen short story collections[9], most of which were translated into English and other languages. Furthermore, his novels served as inspiration for dramas (*Silence*), or were later converted into screenplays for films (*The Sea and Poison*, *Silence*, *Deep River*, and recently a new version of *Silence* by director Martin Scorcese, which is scheduled to appear in cinemas in 2009).

Endo died in 1996 at the age of seventy-three, becoming also one of the best known contemporary authors outside Japan.

A Japanese Catholic

As it is evident from the above mentioned titles, Endo's Christian faith has played an inseparable part of his life and his writing career. Writing primarily with the Japanese

[9] http://www.enotes.com/short-story-criticism/endo -shusakuShusaku Endo 1923–-1996, accessed Jun 20, 2008

audience in mind, he strives to share the incommunicable – the mystery of Christian faith, its paradoxes and its perspectives and to explain its meaning for contemporary Japanese. In his cultural environment, which for centuries struggled to exclude any foreign influences, Endo attempts to interpret the notion of a monotheistic god, who is personal and towards whom an individual needs to form a response, be it a positive or a negative one. Moreover, he emphasizes the image of suffering God incarnated in Christ, a God who experienced rejection and defeat, and is thus capable of sympathy with the weak, with those who had failed in their lives.[10]

Rather than a source of personal comfort, Endo's Catholicism had singled him out among his countrymen, and has brought about paradoxical and complex dilemmas he had to face all his life. As Endo confessed in numerous interviews, his being born Japanese together with the imposition of Catholic catechism and baptism at an early age (influence of his mother and aunt, who had him baptized at the age of 11), created a tension he was trying to settle all his life. While embracing Catholic faith, and allowing it to shape significantly both his life and his writing, Endo continued to question the possibility of reconciling Christian cultural and historical aspects with the Japanese spiritual context. He was critical of the "Western" cultural load that characterizes Christianity, a religion which on one side boasts universality, but on the other it still requires some specific expression.[11]

In one interview, Endo has commented on his Christianity, comparing it to an "ill-fitted suit for Japanese:"

> I received baptism when I was a child…in other words, my Catholicism was a kind of ready-made suit…I had to decide either to make this ready-made suit fit my body or get rid of it and find another suit that fitted…There were many times when I felt I wanted to get rid of my Catholicism, but I was finally unable to do so. It is not just that I did not throw it off, but that I was unable to throw it off. The reason for this must be that it had become a part of me after all.[12]

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[10] Fumitaka Matsuoka, The Christology of Shusaku Endo, http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/oct1982/v39-3-article5.htm, accessed Jun 20, 2008

[11] Dewey, Brett. Suffering the Patient Victory of God: Shusaku Endo and the Lessons of a Japanese Catholic Quodlibet Online Journal: Vol. 6 Number 1, January - March 2004 http://www.Quodlibet.net, accessed Jun 20, 2008

[12] Dewey, Brett.

Also, in reaction to his nickname “the Japanese Graham Greene”, a label frequently affixed to him in order to categorize him as a “Catholic writer”, Endo was quick to emphasize that he views his personal faith and writing as two independent issues. He explains how should an author regard his occupation in relation to his religious belief in his 1963 essay titled Religion and Literature □□□□□.[13] Endo argues that even if a novel’s main theme is God and religion, a “Catholic writer’s” primary task is to portray human beings:

> Catholic literature depicts the fight, joy, and agony of human beings. More over, as long as it is literature, the center of gravity is placed on human beings and never on angels or God. Catholics have to fight against themselves, against sins, against devils, and even against God, and the task of the Catholic writer is to depict these human fights as accurately and sincerely as possible. (...) If Catholic literature alters or distorts the human psychology of the characters in the text for the sake of apologetics or to propagate Catholicism – in other words, for “literature through Catholicism” – then this is not literature in the true sense.

As we see here, Endo always thinks of his role of a writer as being superior to his personal faith, and opposes the use of religious imagery merely for the sake of manipulating the readers into accepting the truths he believes in. In addition, as we shall see later on during the discussion of specific novels, Endo never employs any “deus ex machina” device of God’s triumphant appearance. The focus still remains on characters, and the notion of God is rarely explicit, but rather subdued and barely perceptible. As the title of the most famous novel would suggest, God is indeed present, but it his silence and non-interference that characterize him – and the characters are left to seek him, doubt him, rethink him and relate to him.

Undoubtedly, thanks to his novels and public activity Endo played an important role in improving the image of Catholicism in Japan and making it more comprehensible to a wider audience.[14] Still, he can be seen as an author who is constantly breaking new ground – by communicating the underlying Western concept of a dualistic relation between an individual and a divine being. In Japanese literary and religious tradition, where the prevailing Shinto and Buddhist notions are mainly characterized by pantheism and

[13] Maeri, Megumi, p. 18
[14] Mathy, Francis

numerous impersonal deities, Endo's acknowledgment of the biblical perspective, this "master narrative" in words of Northrop Frye, is a novelty. It was Antonín Líman, in his introduction to *Krajiny japonské duše*, (Landscapes of Japanese Soul),[15] who opens this collection of essays on Japanese literature by posing the question: "whether there exists in the original Japanese tradition something, which would correspond to this [Christian] religious and philosophical dimension, whose absence would render the works of Dante or Milton, or of the modern rebels, as Nietzsche or Dostoyevsky, completely unimaginable?" Líman stresses the underlying current of massive influence of Christianity on European or American tradition, and contrasts it with Japanese outlook on the world, where no such fundamental assumption was present. [Speaking of European authors], Líman continues: "Regardless whether they themselves believe in God or not, that "great code," or as Northrop Frye aptly calls it, the entire biblical tradition, is always present in their works, as metaphysics which is either welcome and worshipped, or rejected and cursed. In the Japanese literary tradition, is there any structural equivalent of Frye's great code? If the biblical tradition has aided in creation of metaphysics, which gave birth to the so called *master narrative* of Christian culture, then what metaphysic system is the "pagan" Japanese tradition built on?"

Líman's statement stresses the fundamental difference between the two traditions, and argues that it is the presence or absence of the Christian influence, which in Europe and America so profoundly shapes our perception of the world, ourselves, humans, and the transcendental, that makes the crucial distinction. In light of this, Endo's writing and the "presence" of the Christian metaphysics should be regarded as particularly unique in the environment where he lived and worked.

[15] Líman, Antonín. *Krajiny japonské duše*, Praha, Mladá fronta, 1999, p. 9

3. Theoretical assumptions: interpreting literary works

Before focusing on the main part, that is discussion and interpretation of characters in Endo Shusaku's novels, it would be indispensable spend some time on consideration concerning the possibility of deducing author's message from his work. In other words, are we to believe that the opinions characters articulate in a particular author's novels are identical with those in the author's mind? Or vice versa, that some experience or thought of the author is reflected in the book he has written, presumably with the intention to share it with his readers and perhaps convince them of his view? Can we really assume that literature serves as a vehicle for expressing the author's stance towards some issues? Is it reasonable to speak of Endo Shusaku as a "Catholic writer" only because some characters in his novels happen to speak in favor of Christian faith?

Without having to employ the sometimes complicated terminology used in literary theory, it becomes obvious from these questions that an important distinction has to be made in the discourse of literature, and all our further discussion will depend on which interpretation we choose to uphold. In other words, first we need to pose a question of how are we going to look at an author, his work, his audience, and the relation between these three entities. To elucidate this presumption, a concept introduced by American literary critic M. H. Abrams in the early 1950s might be useful here: Abrams, in his study The Mirror and the Lamp[16] distinguished four basic elements of literary discourse:

- work: the product of the creative process
- artist: the creator of the work
- universe: everything which has become the subject of the work, and the relationship of the work to "reality"
- audience: those to whom the work is addressed.

The last three elements can be imagined as points of a triangle, with the first one, "the work" placed in its centre. This indicates that the work of art can be explained from its relation to the other entities. Abrams further distinguishes three possible approaches to

[16] quoted in: Procházka Martin, *Literary Theory: An Historical Introduction*. Prague: Charles University, Department of English and American Studies, 2002, p. 5

interpreting literature. The first, called *expressive*, emphasizes the relation between "work" and "artist," and explains art as the artist's self-expression. The second, *mimetic* theory, is constructed on the relation of work to the "universe," and claims that work of art is an imitation of reality, according to Plato's concept of mimesis. The third one, so called *pragmatic* theory, concentrates on art in relation to its audience, and is concerned with interpretation and the effect (often moral or otherwise "improving") it has on its readers. Each of these theories was preferred in different times and different contexts.

In relation to Endo, would any of these suggested approaches be more suitable than others? If we consider the context of Japanese literature where Endo belongs, one might feel more inclined to adopt the "expressive" approach, thinking of the strong tradition of watakushi shosetsu in the 20th century Japanese literature[17] and of the undeniable fact that Endo often closely identifies with his characters. Although Endo did not explicitly draw on the tradition of watakushi shosetsu, in many of his works the identification of the author with the main protagonist or narrator is clearly evident. The confessional style is especially apparent in *Silence*, which is largely composed as an epistolary novel, and in *The Girl I Left Behind*, where excerpts from narrator's diary are used to tell the story. In this case we need to ask to what extent we can identify the narrator with the persona of the real author. As one of the critics points out: "The hero, or at least one of the principal characters, is never far removed from Endo himself. The very situations and experiences that Endo records in his non-fiction appear with a minimum of disguise in his stories. And the faith of this character can be seen growing from work to work."[18] While the first claim may be disputed, I believe the second sentence justifies our presumption that opinions expressed by characters in Endo's novels strongly echo those he expressed in his essays, as will be evident from close reading and consideration of the major characters.

Lastly, I should add that before making any assumptions about author's intended "message" in the text, one might also consider another theory, proposed by French critic Roland Barthes. In addition to the three relational approaches, Barthes suggests, a fourth one should be taken into account. In his famous essay, *Death of the Author*, Barthes

[17] the 1st person narrative, Ich-roman, is a confessional style marked by a complete identification of the author with the main protagonist, by identification of life with literature (...) The subjective style of watakushi shosetsu had a major impact on Japanese literature from the 1920s onward. Winkelhöferová, p. 305, and Novák, p. 69

[18] Mathy, Francis

disregards the three entities symbolized by the three points of Abrams's triangle, and claims that once produced, a work of art begins to exist as an autonomous entity, totally independent of its creator, its recipients and of the reality it should depict. According to Barthes, it is not that the narrator who narrates the text but "the text itself narrates,"[19] and we are to let the text speak to us in this manner.

[19] quoted in Procházka, p. 11

4. Discussion of the main protagonists in specific novels

For the reasons mentioned in the first chapter, I have decided to focus on three of Endo's novels, which also count among the most popular and acclaimed of his works

- The Sea and Poison (Umi to dokuyaku) □□□□
- Silence (Chinmoku) □□
- Deep River (Fukaikawa) □□□

4.1 The Sea and Poison □□□□

This novel, published in 1958, is based on a true incident of a government-sanctioned secret project during which lethal medical experiments were performed on American prisoners of war on the university clinic of Kyushu Imperial University in Fukuoka during World War II. Upon this shameful part of Japanese history, Endo builds his plot, recounting a short span of time when one of the vivisections was performed, and incorporating several characters of the medical staff involved into the story. The centerpiece of the novel is not as much the operation (depicted in quite macabre detail), but the plot focuses more on several characters and their attitudes and reactions. We see the actual event through the eyes of several doctors and nurses involved, and Endo probes into their minds and attitudes. Suffering of the patents and inadequate medical care are contrasted with indifference of doctors who concentrate only on "medical research," as they believe. Common humanity has little place here, and the lethal experiment on the prisoners serves primarily to feed the ambition of the chief surgeon and to boast his chances of becoming the dean of the medical faculty.

Plot and narrative technique

Major part of the story is told in retrospective, several chapters appear to be statements given in court trials after the war, narrated in the first person by those who participated in the Fukuoka experiments. These alternate with third person narrative passages, which take place directly in the hospital during the war. In the first chapter, an unnamed narrator describes moving into a new town and looking for a local physician to continue his treatment of some lung problem. There is something disturbing about the

elderly doctor he makes an appointment with, the narrator often describes him as withdrawn or cold, sensing there must have been something serious in the doctor's past. Out of curiosity he starts to look into the matter privately and later discovers that this physician (dr. Suguro) had been tried for involvement in the Fukuoka hospital medical experiments on American POWs during the war.

The story than switches into a third person narrative, taking place in Fukuoka university clinic in 1944 (□□□□□□□□□□). Two young interns, Suguro and Toda, under the supervision of Dr. Asai and the clinic's chief surgeon Dr. Hashimoto, work in surgery ward, mostly with tuberculosis patients. The end of the war is approaching, bombardment of the city of Fukuoka is underway every night, the hospital lacks supplies and medicines, some patients even die of malnutrition. Especially Suguro, the more sensitive one of the two young doctors, takes hard the patients' suffering and tries to alleviate it whenever possible. He goes out of his way to comfort their fears, and to bring some human touch to the otherwise cold and sterile hospital environment, where poor welfare patients are regarded as mere numbers.

There is a strong sense of competition for prestige between the hospital departments and tensions mount as the election of the new medical faculty dean approaches. The ambitious Dr. Hashimoto uses whatever methods to advance his career and win the coveted post for himself. The cold-heartedness and the impersonal environment of the hospital are especially palpable in the scene when a prominent patient, a relative of the university's head, is hospitalized for a minor lung surgery. Unlike the welfare patients, about whom the other doctors openly speak as "lost cases," special attention is given to the young woman, and the self-assured chief surgeon himself is to conduct the operation. However, due to his mistake, the woman dies on the operating table, and orders are given to all staff to hush the operation's failure.

In the ensuing atmosphere of conspiracy, the staff learns that through his contacts with the military, the chief surgeon has devised a way to restore his academic reputation and win the favor of the university committee. One by one, the concerned doctors, Toda and Suguro among them, are offered participation in a top secret surgery, which in fact will be a medical experiment on several American prisoners of war. It is understood that the vivisection will result in the soldiers' death, but the necessity of such operation for the

advancement of medical research is emphasized to the two interns. Both of them eventually accept, but each of them goes though a different ethical dilemma as the operation approaches.

In the final chapter, where the process of the vivisection on an unsuspecting American is described in chilling detail, Suguro is present during the operation, but finds himself unable to assist Dr. Hashimoto. With rough and ignorant military officers, who are curious to witness the vivisection in the dizzying atmosphere of the operating theatre where all know they are partaking in murder of a human being. Suguro, who seems to be the only one to realize the full import of the fact, spends the time crouched in the corner of the operating room, knowing his refusal to take part in the operation has marred his further medical career, yet also made him guilty of murder – by consenting to it and not doing anything to prevent it. In the jolly merriment of the doctors and officers, who leave to celebrate the successful experiment, Suguro returns to his ward patients, knowing that he – unlike his pragmatic counterpart Toda - will be suffering pangs of conscience for the rest of his life.

Characters

From the outset it is evident, that Endo employs the characters of the two interns to represent and contrast two possible moral attitudes towards the crucial act that is to come. An event so horrendous, the intended death of another human being, is used here as a touchstone, for which several interpretations are possible, each with its own moral implications and each represented by one of the characters.

While Toda sees the operation as a routine medical experiment, beneficial to the advancement of medical research, for Suguro it is clearly an act of murder on another human being, in spite of the war conditions and the enemy soldier.

> Suguro had the impression that there was nothing unusual about the operation he was about to take part in. It was only the word prisoner that jolted him out of that illusion. He found himself oppressed by the realization that he had at last come to the point where it was irrevocably a matter of going ahead or turning aside.

> ‘we are about to kill a man.’ all at once a dark wave of fear and dismay began to flood through him.[20]

Trying to calm Suguro and silence the voice of his own conscience, Toda replies: “What is it that gets you?’ Toda felt a painful constriction in his throat as he spoke. ‘Killing that prisoner? ‘Thanks to him, we´ll now be better at curing thousands of TB patients – because we killed him. Should we have let him live, you think? ‘ (...)You and I happened to be here in this particular hospital in this particular era, and so we took part in a vivisection performed on a prisoner.”[21]

The two interns, friends and classmates, who have shared the same background, now differ in the crucial question and both of their respective claims seem to be justifiable in the given context. Toda’s pragmatic and seemingly humanistic approach (curing patients vs. irrelevant death of enemy soldier) fails when contrasted with Suguro’s idealistic attitude. Suguro is however the one who is more mature of the two, since his he firmly upholds his ideals of medicine intended for helping people, and shows ability to think beyond the cultural, national and political barriers, recognizing the universality of humanity

Endo contrasts the mentality Toda and Suguro in episodes preceding the vivisection. Facing the suffering patients, Suguro does not make the distinction between hopeful and hopeless cases, and his approach to patients is characterized by active effort to go out of his way if he can render even small help to his patients. Considering the scarce resources in the last year of war, and the incurable TB diagnosis most of them have, Suguro’s effort is doomed to fail, nevertheless, he seems to be oblivious of that, and as if at least symbolically, he provides extra care to the patients. These instances include for instance secretly feeding a dying old woman with dextrose, offering words of consolation to a patient fearing operation, even though he is aware she has almost no chance of surviving it, or “gently grasping the old man’s outstretched arm.”[22] His reply to skeptical Toda “I think there’s a chance maybe something can be done.”[23] could be read as Suguro’s life-long

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[20] Endo, Shusaku *The Sea and the Poison*. trans by Michael Gallagher. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973, p. 131
[21] Endo, Shusaku *The Sea and the Poison*, p. 166
[22] *ibid*, p. 159
[23] *ibid*, p. 32

motto, which characterizes him as an eternal optimist, unceasingly striving to persevere to the end, believing there are higher ideals worth striving for. Precisely this strong sense of responsibility is what makes Suguro's life so complicated and what renders him incapable of leading a peaceful life after event war, while Toda will probably have no such issues of guilt in his mind to deal with.

On the other hand, Toda, because he is able to maintain professional disengagement, may not be the best doctor, but it helps him to preserve his sanity in face of suffering. He is by no means portrayed as a villain, or as somebody who would be deliberately, but his indifference to human suffering and his lower moral sensitivity enable him cope with the event he took part in. Toda, playing an elder, wiser colleague, offers fraternal admonition to the hypersensitive Suguro, articulating his own principles as follows: "There's no room, Toda had said, for pity in a doctor in a world such as this. For it would do no good at all and could, in fact, do harm."[24] or in other place: "Sweetness and sentimentality are forbidden luxuries for a doctor."[25]

It can be said that for Toda, progress, success, and ambition is everything. When referring to patients, he uses the names of the symptoms and diagnoses rather than their personal names, and sees them as anonymous cases, who are potential contributors to the advancement of medical science. Any interaction with them or acknowledgment of their physical and mental suffering is for him an unwelcome distraction. Therefore, when presented with the offer to assist with the vivisections, he sees no reason to hesitate with his consent. If there is any sense of justice in his outlook, this is the idea of justice derived from the society, and his only responsibility is, according to Toda's outlook, only to the government authority, which –in the war circumstances – is also volatile and therefore not ultimate. This is made explicit in his first person narrative, where Toda speaks about his childhood. "I didn't think of myself as a person whose conscience had long been paralyzed. For me the pangs of conscience, (...) were from childhood equivalent to the fear of disapproval in the eyes of others – fear of the punishment which society could bring to fear."[26]

[24] ibid, p. 33
[25] ibid, p. 50
[26] ibid, p. 118

In the closing chapter, when exhausted and horror-stricken Suguro meets Toda the night after the vivisection, Toda dismisses the question of conscience by claiming to simply happen to be in a particular place and circumstances. To him, this come-what-may approach is satisfactory. Since even governments are unstable in war, so is their authority to Toda, and he therefore sees no need to fear any higher instance that might call them to give account of what they had just done. There is no ultimate responsibility to him: 'Answer for it? To society? If it's only to society, it's nothing much to get worked up about. Toda gave another obvious yawn. (...) If those people who are going to judge us had been put in the same situation, would they have done anything different? So much for the punishments of society.'[27]

Toda, when reflecting on the operation, simply admits "I have no conscience, I suppose. Not just me, though. None of them feel anything at all abut what they did here."[28] On this point, he is wrong, however. He may be justifying himself by stressing the temporariness of authorities, or sharing common guilt with others, but he is limited in recognizing that there are only worldly authorities to be judged by.

On the other hand, in the figure of Suguro, Endo presents yet another dimension of responsibility – the ultimate one. Introducing the concept of absolute justice into this discourse, Suguro, although by no means a Christian, seems to realize the full import of what had happened. He senses that the act of deliberate taking life of another human being must have some repercussions: "Still...some day, we're going to have to answer for it.' said Suguro, leaning close suddenly and whispering. 'That's for sure. It's certain that we're going to have to answer for it."[29]

In Endo's novels, however, good and evil are always far from the uncomplicated "white and black" dichotomy. In terms of morals, it is Suguro who realizes his guilt (that will paralyze him for life), even though he did not actually lay hand on the prisoner. In the tensed scene, when Suguro refuses to comply in the operating theatre "I can't ...I should have refused before," Toda scolds him "You're a fool (...)"You're already tarnished with the same brush as the rest of us." Toda spoke quietly. ´From now on, there's no way out,

[27] ibid, p. 166
[28] ibid, p. 157
[29] ibid, p. 166

none at all.´"[30] When all is over and the prisoner dies, Suguro desperately exclaims in his mind "I didn't do anything at all."[31] How are we to read this exclamation? Its interpretation will be crucial to the interpretation of the whole problem of shared guilt. Does he mean that he did not harm the prisoner? Or is it a self-accusation, referring to his being guilty of being a passive onlooker? In either case, we know that conscience will haunt dr. Suguro all his life. The ending may suggest that silent consent to evil and non-resistance implies shared guilt, and that being a spectator to evil means to participate in it.

4.2 Silence □□

Endo's best known and most translated novel, *Silence* (Chinmoku), was published in 1966, and in 1969 it was translated to English by William Johnston. The book became an instant best seller, and Endo was awarded Tanizaki Prize for it in 1966, but its publication also spurred great controversy, since one of the novel's themes is the question concerning the possibility of acceptance of Christianity in Japan. Endo set this historical novel to the 1640s, a period of fierce persecution of Christian adherents in Japan. The Japanese Catholic church told its followers not to read it, and the book was banned by schools in Nagasaki and Kagoshima. While some critics praised the novel, its opponents, mainly from the Catholic Church, were dissatisfied with the main character's apostasy and the description of Japan as a swamp where Christianity cannot take root.[32] The translator of *Silence*, William Johnston, however refutes this claim: "The very popularity of Mr. Endo's novel would seem to proclaim a Japan not indifferent to Christianity but looking for that form of Christianity that will suit the national character."[33] Through the spiritual dilemmas that the main protagonist has to face, Endo explores the paradoxes of one's Christian faith in an antagonistic environment.

Before proceeding to the plot and discussion of the characters, I should include a very brief survey of some historic background relevant to the story. The plot of *Silence* is loosely based on a true event, on the fate of a Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Chiara,[34] who

[30] ibid, p. 135
[31] ibid, p. 50
[32] Maeri, Megumi, p. 36
[33] Endo, Shusaku: Silence, trans. William Johnston, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970, introduction by W. Johnston, p. 17
[34] ibid, p. 16

arrived to Nagasaki in 1643, apostatized (renounced his faith) under torture, and later continued to live in Japan under supervision as an ordinary citizen. Christianity was introduced to Japan by Francis Xavier in 1549, and during a period of forty years the new faith flourished and was shared by a community of almost quarter of million.[35] Most of missionary activity was concentrated in Kyushu, where local daimyos were disposed to accept Christianity in order to support their political influence, and gain access to new technology and knowledge brought from Europe. In the early decades the missionaries enjoyed their favor. The era of prosperity came to a halt at end of the 16th century, the primary reasons being continuing unification of Japan and the fact that missionary orders from different European countries competing for influence began to be considered a threat to shogunate's political stability. In 1587, the Jesuits were ordered to depart, and in 1597, twenty-six Christians, including Franciscan missionaries and Japanese converts, were crucified in Nagasaki. In 1614, all foreign missionaries were expelled and an edict requiring all Japanese to register as Buddhists was issued. During ruthless persecutions that followed, Christianity was almost exterminated in Japan, and its surviving adherents who refused to apostatize, were put to death by torture. The public act of apostasy was performed by ordering the suspected Christians to trample or spit on *fumie* (□□) - an image of Christ or Virgin Mary.[36] A fatal blow to the remaining covert Christian community came in 1632, when Portuguese Cristovao Ferreira, the provincial of the Jesuit order in Japan, who has worked there fearlessly for twenty years, apostatized under torture.

This historical figure has served as model for Endo's character. In the novel, however, Ferreira does not appear until late in the book, and the story is told in form of a journal and letters of a young zealous Jesuit from Portugal, Sebastian Rodrigues who with his fellow priest Garrpe leaves for a desperate mission to Japan. In the 1640s, Christianity in Japan has now been eradicated, no missionaries can work there publicly and the few remaining Christians face severe persecution. The purpose of their doomed mission is find and help the underground believers, but for Rodrigues there is a private motive as well: to find the truth about his former teacher and friend, the priest Ferreira, who is rumored to have denied his faith under torture and to be living now with a wife and children in Nagasaki, loyal to his former Japanese prosecutors.

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[35] Cavanaugh, William: The god of silence: Shusaku Endo''s reading of the Passion - critique of the Japanese novel 'Silence' Commonweal, Mar 13, 1998, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1252/is_n5_v125/ai_20485535, accessed Jun 20, 2008

[36] Reinsma, Luke. Shusaku Endo's Silence. Response. Autumn 2004, Vol. 27, Number 4 http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/autumn2k4/silence.asp, accessed Jun 20, 2008

The epistolary form of the novel describes the events in retrospect from the viewpoint of the main character, the priest, and includes his contemplation on the central issues. Only the last chapter is narrated in the third person, in form of an official report to the shogunate by a presumed officer who is guarding Rodrigues after he has apostatized.

After their perilous journey to Japan from Macao, the two priests arrive secretly to an unknown village, and discover there are still secret Christians who have not seen a priest for years. For several months they live in hiding there, perform the sacraments of baptism and confession and celebrate mass for the villagers. Instrumental to their contact with the Christians is Kichijiro, a Japanese who had joined them in Macao, claiming to be also a Christian and knowing where the secret converts live. While Kichijiro now enjoys gratitude of the village for bringing "the fathers," Rodrigues later learns that he is in fact an apostate, and when required to step on the *fumie* to renounce his faith, he had done so, leaving the rest of his Christian family to be tortured and put to death.

Ministering to the villagers brings great satisfaction to Rodrigues, confirming the meaningfulness of his mission to Japan. However, one day the village is visited by daimyo's officials, several Christians are captured and Rodrigues and Garrpe have to separate and to flee in order not to jeopardize others. Wandering lonely through the hostile land, doubts emerge in Rodrigues´ mind, and he begins to reevaluate his missionary vision. While he was raised believing in the glory of martyrdom for the sacred cause, now he is disturbed by thoughts whether he himself would be able to withstand torture. He is rejoined by Kichijiro, who entreats to forgive him for behaving cowardly, and Rodrigues struggles with feelings of disgust towards this man and the need for compassion towards all. Rodrigues now distrusts Kichijiro, realizing he had informed the guards and brought about the torture of the three villagers, but in his effort to emulate Christ, Rodrigues strives to see Kichijiro as a penitent sinner who seeks forgiveness. Rodrigues is now fully aware that Kichijiro may turn him over to the officials any time, but as a priest he follows his duty of compassion with fallen sinners, and begins to accept the idea that his mission will end in martyrdom. Kichijiro does indeed betray him, and Rodrigues is put into prison. Awaiting torture and meditating intensely on Christ's suffering, Rodrigues begins to wish for death, and he is certain he will follow Christ in noble martyrdom.

Witnessing the death of Garrpe, and cruel torture of the Christians from the village, his conviction begins to waver. It is not his death or rumors of terrible torture in the "pit"

he fears, but the realization that his perseverance on his ideals will cause suffering to others. During nights in prison interspersed with groans from the tortured Christians, Rodrigues battles his doubts – about the meaningfulness of his mission to Japan, about himself, and about the very existence of God. Echoing Kichijiro's question "Why has Deus sama given us this trial?"[37] in face of many executions of faithful Christians Rodrigues realizes this question cannot be answered by theological dispute he has learned so far. Having witnessed death of several innocent people, and the apparent indifference of God towards his faithful, Rodrigues dares to articulate his most painful doubt: would not it be better to forsake our ideals which have only made other people suffer? This is the argument that his captors stress, and Rodrigues desperately tries to dispute it, but in a reunion with his admired mentor Ferreira, who is brought to prison to convince him to apostasy, his faith is shattered. Upon Ferreira's insistence, Rodrigues is forced to admit that it was his pride, his persistence on the universality of the doctrine he tried to impose on these people, what causes the suffering, and he feebly consents to Ferreira's arguments. In what is the most painful act for him, Rodrigues eventually tramples on the *fumie*, and renounces what he has been holding sacred all his life.

Here also ends Rodrigues´ narrative voice, and we learn the subsequent events in form of an impersonal report, composed by one of the officials. Rodrigues, who has now accepted a Japanese name, spends the rest of his life under official supervision in Nagasaki.

Silence is a superb portrayal of the complexity of one's faith, and the story raises many questions on spirituality, conscience, responsibility and transferability of Christian belief. Focusing on the characters now, it is evident that Endo weaves the protagonists into the pattern of the New Testament account, and while in *Deep river*, the parallel between the character of Otsu and Jesus was only implicit, in *Silence* this resemblance is acknowledged and indicated by many details. The biblical (in Frye's words) "master narrative" is transposed into the environment of 17th century Japan, and the relationship between Rodrigues and Kichijiro, Christ and his Judas, is explicitly emphasized.

While rich in biblical imagery, it has to be noted that the plot structure of *Silence* also closely resembles that of another famous novel, *The Power and the Glory*. The novel's publication earned Endo the nick name "Japanese Graham Greene," an appellation Endo

[37] Endo, Shusaku: Silence, p. 95

never acknowledged, but the themes and the couple of antithetical protagonists and the dilemma between one's priestly duty and fear, is very similar to that of the pursued "whisky priest" and his Mexican "Judas."

Endo builds the depiction of these two protagonists on the tension between the moral and spiritual integrity of one, and baseness and cowardice of another. On one side, there is the priest, full of noble intentions, resolute to serve his flock even to death, and overcoming his inner doubts in moments, when he oscillates between his natural desire to reject the traitor Kichijiro, and his adherence to ideals of forgiveness and sacrifice, which eventually prevail. On the other hand, the character of Kichijiro embodies the very worst in man. When describing Kichijiro, the priest often reluctantly reveals his disdain for the cowardly and cunning fellow who repeatedly comes back to him. Kichijiro is characterized as a drunk "dressed in rags,"[38] with a "crafty look on his face,"[39] "with furtive eyes" and "servile laugh" and is often likened to a dog ("like a whipped dog,"[40] "followed after me like a wild dog"[41]) Kichijiro clearly has a weak character, and his resolutions to remain faithful alternate with cowardice. At one moment, he displays self-importance when praised for bringing the priests to the village, at another he breaks down when he recalls to Rodrigues his apostasy and betrayal of the whole family; sometimes he is a sincere penitent seeking confession, other times he succumbs to threats and readily renounces his faith again, then desperately tries to win back the priest's favor, only to turn him over to the officials days later and receive the reward of 300 pieces of silver. Kichijiro is alternately confessing and renouncing his faith, according to the given situation.

While Rodrigues struggles with his personal dislike for Kichijiro, Kichijiro tries to excuse his weakness with a seemingly reasonable argument. He claims that he would have made a good Christian in times of peace, but he has been born a coward, and cannot be blamed for failing when faced with torture and persecution:

> "Father, forgive me!" The priest closed his eyes and silently uttered the words of absolution. A bitter taste lay on his tongue. "I was born weak. One who is weak at heart cannot die a martyr. What am I to do? Ah, why was I born into the

[38] ibid, p. 38
[39] ibid, p. 122
[40] ibid, p. 78
[41] ibid, p. 124

> world at all?[42] (…) Father, I betrayed you. I trampled on the picture of Christ. In this world are the strong and the weak. The strong never yield to torture, and they go to Paradise; but what about those, like myself, who are born weak, who, when tortured…"[43]

Serving as an antithesis to the character of Rodrigues, Kichijiro constantly confronts Rodrigues' own ideals of missionary work. Here, Rodrigues has to admit it was the despicable Kichijiro who introduced them to Japanese Christians, and without him, the two priests would not have been able to survive the first months. As one critic[44] in suggests: As the two secretly travel the countryside, there emerges one factor that unites both of them: contrasting them as characters representing two extremes, Endo begins to suggest that the sharp moral line dividing the two can become blurred. While Kichijiro by his deed has deliberately caused suffering to innocent people, Rodrigues is in fact guilty of the same. His mere presence as in Japan, motivated by ideals of spreading Christianity, which in this light appear to be selfish motives, led to the capture and torture of several Japanese Christians, who provided him with shelter. This realization leads to the priest's reevaluation of his motivation, and eventually prompts him to make the most difficult step – apostasy – in order to prevent further persecution.

What does Endo accomplish by building the story on the interaction between these two extreme protagonists? He certainly avoids simple moral stereotypes; instead he portrays humanity in its wholeness, where there are no clear-cut categories, but where one´s morality is judged differently in different contexts and from different perspectives. Prevailing, however, is the notion of Christian forgiveness, forgiveness to all penitents, regardless of their failings.

Sebastian Rodrigues

[42] ibid, p. 259
[43] ibid, p. 297
[44] Cavanaugh, William

As was mentioned above, Rodrigues' faith is being tested during his encounters with Kichijiro. While his early letters to his superiors abound with fervent optimism, later he is honest about his doubts and even articulates thoughts which are heretical in regard of the official Catholic doctrine, but which he believes are justified in this specific environment. Encountering paradoxical situations his theological study could not prepare him for, Rodrigues develops his ability of critical thinking and learns to judge the accepted truths in light of their context. What surprises him most is the shocking incongruity between his imaginations of glorious martyrdom, derived from Baroque paintings and legends of saints, and the very real suffering of real people, which goes unnoticed.

> " They were martyred. But what a martyrdom! I had long read about martyrdom in the lives of saints – how the souls of the martyrs had gone home to Heaven, how they have been filled with glory in Paradise, how the angels had blown trumpets. This was the splendid martyrdom I had often seen in my dreams. But the martyrdom of the Japanese Christians I now describe to you was no such glorious thing. What a miserable and painful business it was! The rain falls unceasingly in the sea. And the sea which killed them surges on uncannily – in silence."[45]

This devastating experience brings spiritual crisis to Rodrigues, because God did not react as he expected, and he realizes that what had happened is so different from the doctrine he had been taught to accept. He begins to fear doubts about God's reaction to human suffering and thus about the purpose of his whole mission: "Behind the depressing silence of this sea, the depressing silence of God…the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent."[46]

While in prison, Rodriguez tries to focus on Christ, who is his foremost model, and he thinks of his fate as resembling that of Christ, believing his mission and martyr's death in Japan will be a reenactment of the Gospel story. His betrayal for three hundred silver coins, his ride on a donkey when he is escorted to Nagasaki, and his expected martyrdom – all these confirm to him that his death will be a victorious one, and he is now prepared to suffer for his noble cause. The turning point, however, comes when he hears the cries of Christians suspended in the pit and Rodrigues realizes they are suffering because of him.

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[45] Endo, Shusaku: Silence, p. 103
[46] ibid, p. 105

The officials make it clear to him that the torture will stop only if Rodrigues consents to apostasy. He now discerns that there is a higher form of love, the Christ-like love for others, which is accomplished by complete surrender of one's self, by self-denial. In the climax of his spiritual struggle, Rodrigues perceives the difference between the doctrinal teaching of the Church, which he held sacred all his life, and an individual act of love which calls for one's self-abnegation.

Upon Ferreira's insistence, Rodrigues eventually becomes convinced that his apostasy will be transformed into an act of love, which will bring him nearer to Christ in his compassion with suffering humans: "You make yourself more important than them. You are preoccupied with your own salvation. If you say that you will apostatize, those people will be taken out of the pit. They will be saved from suffering. And you refuse to do so. It's because you dread to betray the Church. (...) A priest ought to live in imitation of Christ. (..) Certainly Christ would have apostatized for them."[47]

Rodrigues thus accepts that there can be different forms of sacrifice, not only of one's life, but also of one's ideals. The end suggests that what surpasses these ideals is the capacity to forsake them. He begins to see that his previous motivation had been based on pride and approval by the Church, and that the genuine imitation of Christ's salvation requires extreme sacrifice, in this case damnation by the Church that he was disposed to give his life for. Since with the scene of Rodrigues' apostasy ends the first person narrative, the end of the novel remains purposely ambiguous. We do not learn anything else about the former priest, who now lives under a new identity as a defeated man. The protagonist's fate does however demonstrate Endo's conviction of the impossibility of passing judgments, of the complexities of one's loyalty and betrayal, and above all, that in matters of one's conscience facile solutions are never possible.

4.3 Deep River □□□

Let us now turn attention to Endo's last novel, written in 1993, three years before his death. This book was translated into English by Van C. Giesel, a good friend of Endo, and appeared in England as early as 1994, allegedly because Giesel began working on the

[47] ibid, p. 268

translation while Endo was still in the process of writing.[48] The book received Mainichi Cultural Arts Award in 1994.

Unlike the previous novels discussed, deep river is not based on any specific historical event. In the culmination of his life-long work, Endo chose to approach his perennial theme – the question about possibility of reconciliation of "western Christianity" with Japanese psyche. Endo deals with the issue by using five character types and in an almost "laboratory setting:" we follow a group of Japanese tourists on a tour to Varanasi in India. In this spiritually loaded environment he has them interact with each other and attempt to come to terms with their inner spiritual struggles. In the first five chapters, he explores their individual past, troubles, and spiritual search. Each of them has a different end in mind when deciding to join the tour, but each expects to find some spiritual insight that would help them cope with their past and bring some peace to their lives.

Set in the 1970s India during time of civil unrests, when the action culminates, we follow a guided tour of a group of Japanese traveling sacred places of India. The narrative technique employed throughout the novel is that of third person narrative. In the first part the chapters follow the individual characters (who will later become participants of the tour), and the narrative often switches between past and present, showing how each of them has a particular difficult situation or an unresolved problem to deal with, be it a troubled relationship with a spouse, a love affair, an eerie spiritual experience or haunting memories of WWII. From the order and continuity of these chapters we are made to realize that the tour participants have met at some time before, and that their lives are probably more intertwined than they dare to admit. What characterizes all of them is a particular loneliness, an inability to communicate the issue that troubles them, and a resolution to cope with it. All of them sense they need to set out on some kind of a spiritual search. They do not precisely know what to look for and unable to articulate it, since the object of their quest is usually vague, and very unusual or irrational. Although their spiritual and religious sensibilities are very different, at this point in their lives they all began to perceive the need to perform some act that would bring them spiritual consolation and they all feel there is something to be resolved or completed. Incidentally, these four characters join the guided tour to India, each of them with different purpose and expectations, but hoping that they would be able to accomplish their quest there.

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[48] Maeri, Megumi, p. 49

In the second half of the book, we see the group's tour of India and see how through interactions among themselves and the environment the each of the characters goes through some process of growth and reconciliation with their past. Their quest culminates when the group reaches Varanasi, and the by the burial pyres on the banks of the sacred Ganges river each of them attains some private revelation.

There is Mr. Isobe, grieving the death of his wife, for whom he never cared while she was alive due to his preoccupation with work. He clings to her last words, when she entreated him to look for her reincarnated soul, and in his voyage to India, he hopes to overcome his inner emptiness and pay his last duty to his faithful wife. At the end Isobe realizes he should have loved her, and with regret now understands the "fundamental difference between being alive and truly living."[49]

Another character, elderly Mr. Kiguchi, who is a WWII veteran still suffering from the horrors he witnessed during the Japanese invasion in Burma, joins the tour with the purpose of holding a Buddhist memorial service for his fallen comrades. Mr. Numada, a middle-aged writer of children's stories, had recovered from a serious illness. In a near-death experience when he was bedridden in hospital, he was miraculously revived from a coma, and at the same time, a pet bird (a myna bird) his wife had brought him died, as Numada believes, in his stead, thus donating him his life. In India, Numada now hopes to visit the sanctuary where this species of bird lives and thus symbolically repay the debt.[50]

Lastly, a minor set of characters complements the tour participants. The Sanjyos are a young couple of newly weds, irreverent and narrow-minded, unwilling to respect other cultures and religions. Self-confident Mr. Sanjyo and his grumbling wife, who "should've rather taken the tour to Germany"[51] are portrayed as caricatures. Endo mocks their superficiality and ignorance, making them look like awkward tourists in face of encounter with death on the pyres of Varanasi which they are eager to photograph. Their youthful naivety stands in stark contrast with the other characters, who have all had a very

[49] Endo, Shusaku, Deep River; translated from the Japanese by Van C. Gessel. London: Peter Owen, 1st ed., 1994, p. 188

[50] According to one study (Maeri, Megumi, p. 53), this event probably represents the Buddhist notion of migawari □□□□, or taking one's place, ie. "taking one's place in times of great difficulty." In the context of Endo's Christianity, this act of somebody dying in place of another person might well refer to the biblical gospel story as well, indirectly pointing to Christ's sacrifice.

[51] Endo, Shusaku, Deep River, p. 35

close experience with death and human suffering, and who therefore recognize the spiritual importance of Hindu burial rites performed on the Ganges's banks.

The most vivid of the characters is young Mrs. Mitsuko Naruse, a woman with a wild past and a failed marriage, who hopes to find a friend from her university studies who is rumored to be living in India now. Her relationship with this friend, Mr. Otsu, is a more complicate one. As we learn from the initial chapters, the two had met during their university studies in Tokyo. Mitsuko was then pursuing a French literature major and Otsu was studying theology and aspiring to become a Catholic priest. His outdated attire, clumsiness, and avoidance of exuberant life on a liberal campus of the early 1960s, together with his piety made him a prime target of ridicule among fellow students. In an effort shame tempt him, Mitsuko engaged in a meaningless cruel flirt with Otsu and then ruthlessly dumped him. While it was no more than a trifling affair for her then, Mitsuko cannot forget Otsu and still feels attracted to him, for reasons she herself does not quite understand.

The central figure, Otsu, is first presented as a lonely and insecure theology student. Later, we learn he had been studying in a seminary in Lyon, France, as he had wished, but this experience had turned disappointing. As a Japanese, he experienced disillusionment and discrimination from his Catholic superiors (a clear parallel with Endo's own biography), resulting to his breach with the Church and establishing a new existence in India, where he serves the poorest Hindu people on the streets of Varanasi, helping to carry the dying to the sacred river of Ganges. It is here where Mitsuko finds him again, and in the fleeting moment they spend together, Mitsuko realizes a profound truth about her own life. However, during riots in Varanasi, Otsu is trampled on by an angry mob and carried into hospital, where his condition becomes critical. This is also the last sentence of the novel, leaving Otsu's and Mitsuko's fate open.

Deep River can be read as a multiple Bildungsroman, tracing psychological and spiritual growth of several characters. Another way to interpret the novel would be taking the Ganges river as a symbol - for instance of salvation, life, or the divine, considering what it represents to each of the characters. It could even be read as an archetypal "quest" narrative in postmodern era, where the Japanese in their tour bus undergo a present day pilgrimage to a holy site, albeit each with an entirely different religious background. Perhaps Endo intended the characters rather like archetypes, from Isobe, to whom notion

of spirituality is completely new, to Otsu devotes his entire life to practice of his faith. While coming from the world of material security and comfort, all the characters lack peace of spirit and mind, and the conventional guided tour becomes a quest for the transcendental, with each of them hoping to find a life-changing revelation at its end. We are thus presented with a contrast between something as mundane as a tourist trip, and a profound spiritual event, resembling a private epiphany for each of the characters. The plot is then built on the tensions between the profane and the transcendental, which intermingle in the setting that Endo created. A biblical reading of the novel might also be considered, with Otsu clearly representing the Christ-figure (mocked, rejected, excluded, shunned by the official religious authorities, practicing his faith in an unorthodox way and consummating his ministry in a martyr's death).

Let us now focus on the unlikely couple of Otsu and Mitsuko, and on how Endo employs them in the novel to contrast their attitudes towards the divine. Both characters undergo a process of transformation and we see them in several stages of their development, their paths diverging and then coming together after a long time in India. While Otsu's Christian faith is shown as firmly established at the very beginning, and he progresses along these lines towards a later all-embracing, broadened vision of Christian values applicable to all humanity regardless of cultural boundaries, Mitsuko's atheism is confronted with a distorted notion of God, whose existence she struggles to ascertain.

Mitsuko

Mitsuko, after her "wild years" in college, believes that marriage and life of a conventional housewife will bring about some sense of stability and peace to her mind. She earnestly believed that happiness will come when she ceases to act like a rebel and simply begins to live in conformity with society, "to become a commonplace house-wife and to

bury herself like a corpse amongst men and women who were replicas of her husband."[52] The dull marriage is short lived, and to find some fulfillment, Mitsuko begins to work as a volunteer in hospital, caring for dying patients. Outwardly representing a radical change from her rebel days to selfless work for the needy, she is perfectly aware that her volunteering is merely a pose to console her conscience, and that inside she remains the same "From her own hunger for love, she cultivated the masochistic desire to engage in a make-believe charade of love (...) Mitsuko knew that what she performed were not acts of love from her heart, but mere play-acting."[53]

During the tour to India, which she had joined with no particular reasons in mind, we see her growing from this superficial imitation of inadequate love to a better understanding of humanity and love which is supported by deeds of sacrifice. Mitsuko realizes that the outcasts she has seen in Varanasi, who die forsaken on the streets, are no different from her in their humanity. The mighty river, which gives water to the living and receives the ashes of the dead, now becomes a symbol for her, a symbol of continuing cycle of life, of the universality of all humanity.

When one of the tour participants, old Mr. Kiguchi, gets sick and is unable to continue with the group, Mitsuko offers to stay in the hotel in Varanasi and nurse for him, thus missing the other sights. At this point, her desire to help is genuine, and results from the need that has arisen, not from her concern to appease her own conscience as she had been doing before as a hospital volunteer. Having seen the suffering of the poorest in India, she recognizes there are many who need such practical help she can provide, and she is now able to put the others´ needs above her own interests. In this scene when she stays in a hot room with the sick Kiguchi, the narrator explains her act as part of larger, all-embracing vision of compassion with humanity, which is not limited by religion or culture: "Since her arrival in India she had gradually developed an interest not in the India where Buddhism was born, but in the India of Hinduism, in which purity and defilement, holiness and obscenity, charity and brutality mingled and coexisted."[54] In this moment, when she is able to act selflessly, she learns that her friend Otsu has been seen in Varanasi. He had been living with a community now, doing charity work among the most miserable,

[52] ibid, p.52
[53] ibid, p. 124
[54] ibid, p. 152

collecting dead bodies of fallen beggars on the streets and helping carry the sick to the holy river.

For Mitsuko, the trip to India has brought a reversal of her attitude to Otsu, and recognition that it was her life, which had lacked meaning so far. In Varanasi, she begins to experience some vague spiritual awakening, a recognition that there *must* be more to life that an ordinary course of existence: "An evening mist had engulfed the city, and Mitsuko suddenly felt as though everything in her life had been meaningless and futile. Not just this trip to India, but everything about her up to the present day: her years at school, her brief marriage, her hypocritical imitation of volunteer work, even walking around this unfamiliar city in search of Otsu. Yet, at the core of her senseless actions, she vaguely perceived that she yearned for something. A something that would provide her with a sure sense of fulfillment. But she could not fathom what that something might be."[55]

When she finally finds Otsu, Mitsuko is now able to understand that external labels and value ascribed by society are not important. What matters most is practical help to those who need it, regardless of the circumstances and the necessity of crossing any cultural boundaries. Otsu, whose activities she had considered pointless all her life, appears now in her eyes not as someone deserving pity, but instead she begins to look at him with certain admiration and respect. Moreover, the notion of cross-cultural understanding is strongly emphasized here. Shunned by his religious order, Otsu's work is not recognized nor encouraged by the church authorities, who denied him his priesthood. Now he works in a place characterized by filth, suffering and despair, among the poorest outcasts, a Catholic Japanese giving his life for Hindus in India. While before Mitsuko viewed Otsu's study and activity as meaningless, as she spoke about him when she met him as a seminarian in France: "This man, who was throwing away his life for a useless hallucination."[56] Now, Mitsuko is able to confess: "From the viewpoint of any ordinary person, my friend has lived a really pointless existence…but since I've come here, I've started to think maybe it hasn't been so pointless after all."[57]

[55] ibid, p. 180
[56] ibid, p. 66
[57] ibid, p. 162

Otsu

Coming now to Otsu, his life seems to represent above all the tensions between the superficial and the substantial, between external appearances and their actual realizations in various circumstances. His very existence and portrayal in the book seems to suggest that lives of real people defy neat categorization by stereotypes or tradition. His crossing and challenging the established notions of both the prevailing social trends (as we see during his college days) and the doctrinal authority (the breach with his theology faculty) draws on the line of similar Endo's characters, most notably Sebastian Rodrigues in *Silence*. In Japan, Otsu is an outsider, someone, who does not belong – either to the academic environment on the campus, or with his Catholicism into prevailing religious traditions of Japan. When he travels to study in Lyon Catholic seminary, hoping to be understood there, he encounters misunderstanding and prejudice for being an Asian and for introducing notions which his superiors consider irreconcilable with the European vision of Christianity, that is of Christian God understood only through the prism of Western cultural thinking. Knowing his own heritage of a Catholic living in Japan, Otsu, unlike his teachers in the priesthood order, is able to recognize that "God has many faces."[58] This is again reminiscent of some themes suggested in *Silence*, where the author speaks of many faces of martyrdom. Another common theme of these two novels is that one's being born into different culture or prevailing religious tradition and worshipping God according to one's understanding does not alter the nature of the very same God. According to Otsu, he "(does) not believe that the European brand of Christianity is absolute."[59] His broader idea of one God who might be worshipped in different forms by other world religions is considered heretical by his superiors. Otsu's character echoes the dilemma of Rodrigues, when he speaks of his search for "a form of Christianity that suits the Japanese mind."[60]

Otsu is being implicitly compared with the figure of Jesus throughout the novel. He patiently bears the role of a university outsider, and does not make an attempt defend himself against the ridicule and cruel jokes of his classmates. (He) "begins to understand…just a little the sufferings of that man who was rejected by all men."[61] Otsu does not fit into categories prescribed by the society, for one group, his religious

[58] ibid, p. 121
[59] ibid, p. 121
[60] ibid, p. 66
[61] ibid, p. 62

conviction is unacceptable, for another it is his Japanese origin. With his own vision of Christianity that surpasses the European context, he challenges the established authorities, and goes into remote places to live it in reality. For his unorthodoxy, he had been turned away from becoming a priest in Catholic Church, and Otsu thus fulfills his vision in places totally unexpected, where he is the one of the few Christians, living his life among Hindu outcasts, an *excluded* person among the *excluded*. The final scene, where Otsu succumbs to an angry crowd and it is suggested that his selfless ministry might end in martyrdom, only accents the intended parallel with the Gospel account.

At the end of the novel we thus see the all characters arriving to some crossroads in their lives, where they receive their "private revelation," although perhaps not in the way they expected, and they are left to make some radical change in their lives. To summarize, all of the tour participants learn to value life, paying more attention to things that truly matter in the absolute sense. As it is suggested here, these are above all compassion, sacrifice for others when necessary, and courage to cross given boundaries.

5. Portrayal of Man in Endo's novels

What can one learn from the portrayal of man in Endo's novels we have just discussed? Are there any common themes that permeate his works, and if so, what can be deduced from them? In the above analysis of the characters appearing in Endo's novels we have seen that the author purposely uses a certain pattern for the main protagonists and their intended function in a particular work. One of his strategies is to set a certain framework, within which the characters act and react to a given situation, and by their attitude to the problem and to the other protagonists they demonstrate possible approaches, which are well transferable into the realm of real life of contemporary society. We have noted that the author's technique regarding the characters and their relations to one another and the situation often resembles that of a laboratory experiment: he places them into extreme situations, which are immensely difficult in their nature, and by reacting to them the characters arrive to their limits which reveal the very best and the very worst in human character. Endo's imagination knows virtually no boundaries in creating this environment – it can be an observation of a closed group of tourists, an ethical dilemma in a WWII setting, or times of religious persecution, but all these situations have one thing in common – they impose on the characters situation entirely different from the normally accepted standards, and the protagonists are left alone to formulate their own response in the given context. In this uncanny situation the characters are left with no guidelines, instead, their response must be based on their own original course of thinking, which in all cases goes against the established norms of what is considered "proper," "just" or "ethical."

Such decisions take great courage on part of the protagonists, and they arrive to this solution after a lengthy grueling process, during which their moral and spiritual integrity is tested, and they eventually come to learn to trust their own conscience rather then what they have been told all their life. We see that such a critical decision may lead to their downfall, or rejection by the majority, leaving them alone, sometimes in doubt over its consequences. The setting of Endo's novels suggests that even the terms of ethics and morality are volatile in today's world, and that the norms imposed by the official authority in power (the military government in *The Sea and Poison*, Jesuit order in *Silence*, or secular environment of the 1970s Japan vs. Otsu in *Deep River*), may not be absolute. What shines through is the individual responsibility of man, who – in extreme situations like these – has the right to formulate a response that goes contrary to what the majority

commands. When is such radical response justified? The plot of these three novels suggests that such defiance of official authority is desirable when it becomes necessary for the sake of other human beings.

Evident throughout the novels is the preoccupation with human beings in need, and for such cause, Endo suggests, even great ideals are to be abandoned if such disobedience to the officially proclaimed course leads to salvation of another human being. We see the two extreme responses to the problem in *The Sea and Poison*, and in *Silence*. Doctor Suguro is alone with his disapproval of the official policy, but his realization of the bestiality of the medical system he works for comes too late, and he is unable to carry out his protest. In contrast, Rodrigues in *Silence* is a very similar type of character, an individual who comes to a resolution which stands contrary to the accepted ecclesiastical doctrine, but who succeeds in putting this decision into action, and is thus able to make a difference.

Speaking of the setting, Endo's plot and character development often follows that of the New Testament story. This parallel is explicitly acknowledged throughout *Silence*, but it functions in several Endo's novels as well: the character of Otsu in *Deep River*, and for instance the protagonist of Mitsu in *The Girl I Left Behind*, a novel set in the 1960s Tokyo, evidently depict characteristics and events reminiscent of Christ's life in the gospel account. The biblical parallel may have several functions: presuming the readers are familiar with the gospel narrative, the author may use the Christ-like protagonist to accent certain biblical aspects he deems relevant and which he would not be able to communicate explicitly. Also, transposing the pattern of the biblical story into a culturally very distinct environment may speak for the transferability and universality of Christian values – in the novels we discussed these might be for instance selfless sacrifice for others, compassion with those who are on the margins of society, sympathy with human suffering. Here, these protagonists might have been intended as models, whose actions and intentions become obvious from the story without any moralizing or didacticism.

Endo's compassion with humanity, as it appears in his works, is also unique in its scope: his vision is enlarged to embrace all, and ready to transcend boundaries of one's nationality, race or religion when necessary. The recognition that in spite of all cultural, social and political differences there is only one humanity is clearly apparent in nearly all his novels. It is evident, that the author deliberately chooses such settings, which bring

together improbable encounters across religions and cultures, and experiments with moving the protagonists away from their customary environment. His interest in cross-cultural themes (personalized for example in several protagonists who are outsiders for their religion, their nationality, or both, and transferred to foreign surroundings) is to demonstrate that when these cultural layers are shed in such extreme situations, the common humanity of all is revealed. In situations like this the protagonists learn that in times of suffering, these external differences cease to exist and they come to a realization that their counterparts or even enemies are above all fellow human beings.

As was said above, Endo avoids simple dichotomy between “right” and “wrong” and demonstrates that human life is infinitely more complex and characterized by a large number of alternatives anywhere on the scale between these two poles. For this reason he frequently builds the plot around two central protagonists, who act as counterparts and represent clearly defined attitudes. In the novels discussed, we have seen such contradictory character pairs in Toda and Suguro, Kichijiro and Rodrigues, and Otsu and Mitsuko. In the opening chapters, all of these couples seem to be clearly delineated and positioned at the two opposing ends of the imaginary “moral” scale. At the beginning, it appears that their antithetical characteristics represent the presence or absence of certain values – strong sensibility, conscience, moral awareness, loyalty to authority, conformity with the prevailing trends, religious devotion, pragmatism or idealism. Endo was known for his preoccupation with the inadequacy of perfunctory moral labels, and one of his recurrent themes is the complexity of man’s conscience and the subsequent impossibility of judging one’s motives in extreme situations by ready-made moral categories. As the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that this clear-cut duality was only superficial, and that the line dividing these two opposing protagonists in reality becomes distorted. The extreme situations into which Endo places these character pairs make them react in ways which defy the conventional “either-or” moral dichotomy, and the alternative they eventually choose implies that judgment on one’s actions always needs to be done in view of the context in which these were performed. By depicting such individuals, the author seems to emphasize two points: firstly, that human life is manifold and confronts men with dilemmas without a precedent, where commonly accepted truths and norms of morality are inapplicable.

Secondly, Endo also displays great understanding for these individuals who make such a decision that seemingly makes them deny truths which were deemed absolute. His works suggest that there is one criterion by which such action may be justified, and that is concern for fellow human beings. We have seen Suguro, who – albeit his reaction comes too late – is the only one to recognize a fellow human in the American prisoner, then Rodrigues, renouncing his faith and position in Church to stop the suffering of his Christian brethren, and lastly Otsu, forsaking his comfort and career in Catholic church in order to do live in obscurity and perform charity work among the dying outcasts. All three of them demonstrate that there are situations in life when official doctrines may be challenged, they undergo a process during which they learn that there are things worth transgressing accepted boundaries, and that immediate help to fellow men in need is one of them. In context of Endo's works these three characters can thus be read as models, reminding us of the same.

6. Conclusion

The works of Endo Shusaku and the themes discussed in them derive from his own unique life. Drawing on hi experience with isolation and misunderstanding in a foreign environment, and then his being an exception in Japan for his Catholic faith, Endo certainly shows profound understanding for those in similar situations, and his observations become even more relevant in the present-day world where multiculturalism and migration are some of the foremost issues. In spite of the complexities that interactions between various cultures, nationalities and beliefs bring, Endo's novels reveal hope that these differences will not be impediment to mutual tolerance and understanding across these boundaries.

Essential to this understanding and compassion with others will be individuals who resemble the protagonists appearing in the three novels we have examined: people who dare to listen to their conscience and follow their inherent sense for justice, even at the cost of "going against the current" and the risk of losing the favor of majority. This, I believe, would be the "message" Endo's works, and also the reason why he remains one of the most respected contemporary authors.

This paper's objective was the discussion of Endo Shusaku's characters and the portrayal of man in his novels. This is a theme that could be also studied in larger perspective, which would not be purely literary, but could easily overlap with disciplines of psychology, theology, ethics or philosophy. I recognize the scope of this paper and my ability to interpret Endo's works is limited in this respect, but if this thesis at least helped to raise interest in the works of this unique author, it has served its purpose.

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